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May Craig Says:

President Takes Some Lumps--As His Program Lags

John Fitzgerald Kennedy's first three months in the White House are over and we ask: "How is he doing?" The answer from practically everybody, from the editors here for their annual meeting to members of Congress back from Easter at home, is that he is popular, but his program isn't. They say the people have come to know him well in the campaign via newspapers, magazines, and radio-TV--and including the televised press conferences. But he is now in his fourth month and has got precious little of his program. The people, generally, know little about it. Kennedy thinks this proves his point: he has to get his program over to the people

and get them to prod Congress into enacting it.

Powerful organizations and elements of the population are against him: the medical association is against his medical care for the aged; business fears Senate hearings on financing electrical equipment officials will rebound against all business; labor remembers labor legislation put through partly by Senator Kennedy backed by brother Robert, counsel to the Senate investigating committee, and now in the powerful seat of attorney general; dividend recipients don't like idea of taxing what is presently tax free, and shops fear more sales taxes. Herds of lobbyists are here, ready to defend to the death the clients whose interests they protect.

Kennedy has failed to get the five weekly press conference on which he depended to get himself over in every living room. Networks carry bits they think newsworthy, not necessarily what he wants featured.

He is thinking about inside chats, as FDR did. It is not easy to get free time with people may not listen. He is appearing before more organizations with speeches which can get on the air--the newspaper editors here last week, the publishers in New York this week.

THE CUBANS debacle, was the first hard fall for the new President; he has not won anything yet in Iraq; the Congo is a chancey thing, and we will have to pay for part of the cost of United Nations action there, though there are 55 other Nations in UN.

Privately he had done a good deal to help the Cubans in exile to make them try to invade; hoping Cubans in Cuba would rise to help them. Our intelligence was bad. Castro not only had jets and tanks from the Soviet Union, he had secret police, modeled after Stalin and Khrushchev to terrorize the people into quiet when the Cubans landed on the beaches.

The crusade of the exiles was doomed before it started--only they and we did not know it. Kennedy is furious, behind the quiet face he showed at his press conference the day we knew the invasion had failed. He is having a thorough study made of the Central Intelligence Agency which failed to assess the Soviet strength Castro had. He takes the blame on himself.

At his press conference he said: "I am the responsible government official." But he knows that his responsibility is based on inadequate and wrong information from officials on whom he depended, as a President must depend on his team.

Washington is intrigued that he is putting in charge of this comprehensive investigation Gen. Maxwell Taylor, former Army chief of staff, who resigned and left the Army with a blot about how the Army was being downgraded. Calling Taylor back to make the investigation strikes terror into those who shortchanged Taylor while he was in the Army. Kennedy's decision to pep up conventional and guerilla services are exactly what Taylor and the Army had been hollering for.

THE PRESIDENT is getting some action, though slow, on his bills. In Congress, but the bills are not as he likes them. He will have to learn to live with this--he was in House and Senate himself and did his share of thwarting the Chief Executive. Now the shoe is on the other foot and it pinches.

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